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DEP INSTITUTES STATEWIDE DROUGHT WATCH

(10/P88) TRENTON - Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin today issued an expanded, statewide drought watch, asking all state residents to voluntarily conserve water due to continued hot and dry conditions that have persisted all summer, and are taxing reservoir, stream and groundwater levels.

The decision to expand an existing drought watch that had been in place for the state's five northeastern counties is a result of record high temperatures and water demands, combined with near-record precipitation lows.

"The drought is deepening and showing no sign of letting up soon, which has made it imperative to take this step now," said Commissioner Bob Martin. "Our scientists have been closely monitoring the water situation and feel this is a necessary measure."

"What the entire State really needs is several days of heavy, soaking rain. But until we get some weather relief, we're asking all state residents to join in an effort to preserve our precious water supply, to more carefully use water and voluntarily reduce unessential use."

Taking steps such as limiting lawn watering, cutting back on at-home car washing, and just doing the laundry when the machine is full can save millions of gallons of water daily and help get us through this situation, said the Commissioner.

A drought watch is a response to deteriorating water supply conditions, with a goal of raising public awareness and formally alerting all water suppliers to the situation, to help preserve existing supplies and balance reservoir storage.

The DEP is not issuing a formal drought warning at this time, which could initiate mandatory steps such as water transfers between regional water supply systems. Instead, the Department is asking residents across the entire state to be aware of the situation and use water more carefully. The goal is to moderate water demand through voluntary conservation.

New Jersey has had no significant rainfall since more than five inches of precipitation inundated a portion of the northeast sector of the State nearly three weeks ago. Some areas have received 25 percent or less of expected summer rainfall. As a result, precipitation indicators have dropped to the severely dry category in the state's central, coastal north and coastal south regions.

Stream flow levels also declined to the severely dry category in the coastal north region. Only in the coastal south region are stream flows moderately dry. Hot, dry weather continues to stress shallow groundwater and is beginning to impact some private wells.

"It's a matter of the state's faucet being turned off at the same time we've had little relief from the heat," said Steve Doughty, research scientist in the DEP's Division of Water Resources Management. "So, every gallon of water we can save now will extend our supply in case a return to normal weather conditions occurs later than we hope."

According to State Climatologist David Robinson of Rutgers University, New Jersey is experiencing its warmest summer (June-August) on record since weather data has been kept starting in 1895. This followed the warmest spring on record. Every month since March has ranked in the top 10 of all time for heat, with August ranked 10th, July ranked 2nd and June as the first hottest month in the past 105 years.

At the same time, below average rainfall has accompanied the heat. The preliminary average for summer precipitation stands at 8.35 inches statewide, making it the 10th driest summer of all time and the driest summer since 1966.

Average statewide rainfall in August was just 2.42 inches, or 2.14 inches below normal, making it the 15th driest August on record. But rainfall levels have varied dramatically across the state. More than 8 inches fell this summer at the Charlotteburg reservoir in northern Passaic County while less than one-half inch of rain fell on most of Burlington County.

The following are some suggested water conservation tips:

- Do not over-water lawns and landscaping. Two times per week for 30 minutes in morning or late evening is sufficient. Use a hose with a hand-held nozzle to water flowers and shrubs.
- Turn off the faucet while brushing teeth and shaving.
- Run washing machines and dishwashers only when full.
- To save water at home, fix leaky faucets and pipes.

More information on water conservation and water supply status can be found at www.njdrought.org/ideas.html and www.njdrought.org/status.html

Information on the State's 90-day precipitation rate can be found at:
http://water.weather.gov/precip/index.php?layer%5B%5D=0&layer%5B%5D=1&layer%5B%5D=4&timetype=RECENT&loctype=STATE&units=engl&timeframe=last90days&product=dep_normal&loc=stateNJ

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